

How to do Meditation and Yoga to Reduce Stress

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Most societies have developed methods to passively induce altered states and the relaxation response. For example, in most religions, prayer and/or meditation is common. It is often done rhythmically and repeatedly and, when carried out for a long period of time, a relaxed or altered state is often reached. This repeated form of prayer and meditation is common in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Roman Catholicism. Some other forms of passively induced altered states, besides meditation, are systematic relaxation, self hypnosis, yoga, and biofeedback. Most of these alternatives, besides being used for tension and stress reduction, can also be used for alleviating insomnia. When using them for sleep, do them lying down. When you use them for stress reduction, sit comfortably in a chair.

Meditation

There are many forms of meditation. Most trace their ancestry from ancient yoga and Zen Buddhism. TM, or transcendental Meditation, based upon Hindu teaching, is practiced by some. A **secret mantra (sound)** is given to the meditator by a teacher of the technique. This sound is then repeated over and over with eyes closed. Some types of Hindu and Buddhist practices focus upon a **mandala- a visualization of some object** such as a thousand-petal lotus. Regardless of their origin, **all the meditative techniques have at least two phases. The first is to quiet the body, and the second is to quiet the mind.**

This relaxation is often done in the following sequence:

1. Relaxing the motor muscles i.e. arms, legs
2. Decreasing the breathing rate.
3. Decreasing the rate of other body functions.
4. Slowing brain activities.

Meditation is often considered the process of trying to eliminate the chatter of the mind-the constant thinking, planning, and fantasizing-which occupies the conscious state of the mind every waking moment. As arousal is reduced, so is anxiety. Self transcendence, or an altered state, is then achieved. Most meditators find they feel creative, positive, calm, and energetic after meditation.

A simple easy to learn meditative exercise, which combines both a mantra and a mandala, is described as follows:

1. Find a quiet place where you can be alone if possible. (This technique may be done in crowded places as long as it is appropriate for you to close your eyes. If you cannot escape to your bedroom or other isolated spot, you can always close the stall door in a public facility to achieve some degree of aloneness and privacy.)
2. Sit in a comfortable position.
3. Close your eyes and take three deep breaths. Let your thoughts come and go.
4. Start to visualize a particular object-for example, a rose.
5. In your thoughts, start to repeat the word for the object-"rose"-over and over, at any speed or rhythm it wants to go.
6. As you continue to repeat the word, start to imagine the rose opening and closing in the same rhythm.
7. If distracting thoughts come into your mind, let them pass through. Continue to repeat your word and see its image. (Often, worries of the day, like "what shall I have for dinner" or "I have three exams to study for," will flow through your mind to distract you.?)
8. Keep this process going from two to twenty minutes.
9. When it is time to stop, open your eyes slowly.

You should feel relaxed, refreshed, and less anxious after trying this technique.

Yoga

Yoga is a Sanskrit word meaning "union". The practice is at least 3000 years old, and its origins can be traced to India. It is considered to be a philosophical system. **There are now several sects or "paths" of yoga** which have developed over the years. Bhakti yoga is a way of devotion of love and faith directed to God. It uses chants and worship, **Dhyana yoga** is a method of concentration. It is a purely mental discipline leading to trance states. **Karma yoga** is concerned with selfless work and good deeds. Charitable acts are accomplished by individuals who follow this path. **Kriya yoga** is primarily concerned with religious action and ritualism. **Kundalini yoga** theorizes potential energy coiled up in the nervous system, which can be released with the recitation of sacred mantras. **Hatha yoga** is the most familiar to Westerners. It is the path of health using exercise as a means to mental and physical

harmony.

All forms of yoga teach methods of concentration and contemplation to control the mind, subdue the primitive consciousness, and bring the physical body under control of the will. In Hatha yoga, slow stretching of the muscles in exercise is taught, along with breathing in certain rhythmical patterns. The body positions or asanas for exercises and meditation can be learned, with some practice, by most. These positions are thought to clear the mind and create energy and a state of relaxation for the individual.

A common breathing technique that can be done while in the Siddha, or Lotus position (sitting on the floor with the feet tucked under the knees), is as follows:

1. Sit comfortably in the Siddha position.
2. Breathe in through the mouth to the count of 6. Hold your breath to the count of 9. Exhale your breath through the mouth to the count of 3.
3. Repeat this procedure three times.
4. Breathe in through the mouth and out through the nose, using this procedure, three times.
5. Then hold the left nostril closed with a finger and repeat the procedure, breathing through the right nostril three times.
6. Continue to repeat the procedure in the following manner. Breathe through the left nostril, breathe deeply or shallowly, hot or cold, panting, puffing, or making animal-like noises such as mooing, cooing, barking, etc. Repeat each of the breathing patterns three times for each sound or part you are concentrating upon. These breathing exercises can then be done in the various yoga positions. After engaging in this activity, many find that they feel relaxed and are energized, alert, and calm.

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